



Aurora Avenue North

N 110th Street to N 145th Street



October 2006

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQ) FOR AURORA BUSINESSES AND NEIGHBORS

The purpose of the FAQ is to address many of the questions that we have heard over the past year from you - business and property owners, their patrons, community groups, and neighbors. As the project develops, we will periodically revise this flyer and incorporate additional questions.

General project information

Tell me about this project.

The Aurora Avenue North Transit, Pedestrian, and Safety Improvement Project from N 110th Street to N 145th Street builds upon the SR 99 Corridor Study completed in 2003 by the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT), Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT) and King County Metro Transit (Metro). The study included a series of recommended improvements along Aurora Avenue North from the north end of the Battery Street Tunnel to N 145th Street in Shoreline.

The ultimate goal for the project is to **improve driver and pedestrian safety** along Aurora Avenue North. Additional goals include:

- Minimizing right-of-way needs and impacts to property owners and businesses
- Finding workable parking solutions for businesses with limited lot space
- Improving transit operations
- Improving traffic flow
- Improving the aesthetics along the corridor
- Keeping the Aurora business district thriving and vibrant

SDOT is now the lead agency charged with implementing the recommended improvements in the corridor study area between N 110th Street to N 145th Street. These improvements include:

- Widening existing lanes
- Adding a 24-hour southbound business access and transit (BAT) lane. BAT lanes are designated lanes for transit and right-turning vehicles only
- Adding a median with clearly defined left-turn and u-turn locations
- Constructing continuous sidewalks and landscaping on both sides of Aurora
- Improving pedestrian crossings at intersections

What is the schedule for the project?

The preliminary engineering for the stretch between N 110th and N 145th Streets is close to completion and we expect to finish by the end of this year. The detailed design of a portion of this 35-block corridor will begin afterward and will continue for about two years. We anticipate that the first segment to be designed and constructed fully will be the stretch between N 137th and N 145th Streets.

Subsequent phases will be completed as funding becomes available roughly over the next 8-12 years. The phasing will be largely determined by available funding, though consideration is also given to minimizing construction impacts and costs. Construction of the first segment could begin as early as 2008. SDOT is also considering the timing of utility modifications and improvements. Seattle Public Utilities might complete some of these utility upgrades prior to or during the major widening construction.

To that end, some modifications to the utilities (such as the drainage system) or the intersections could begin as early as 2007. As the design of the first segment is refined, we will update this schedule.

What type of environmental documentation will be prepared?

A SEPA Determination of Non-Significance and a NEPA Categorical Exclusion supported by several technical reports are scheduled to be completed by the end of this winter.

What's being done to minimize construction disruptions along Aurora?

SDOT knows that construction causes frustrating disruptions to businesses, commuters and residents, and will do what it can to minimize disruptions. Whether construction along the corridor is phased or not, disruptions associated with construction can happen in either scenario. One advantage to phasing construction is that disruptions are more localized than if the corridor was entirely widened at one time. Funding is another important benefit. SDOT will phase this project to take advantage of existing funding that we have for the construction of the stretch between N 137th Street and N 145th Street. Part of that funding comes from federal and state grants that essentially require us to "use it or lose it."

How can I get involved? Who can I contact with questions?

SDOT has been involved in an intensive outreach process for the past year and a half which has included meetings with the community, business associations, and property owners. You are encouraged to attend public meetings and informational briefings, respond to our project newsletters and mailings, and visit our project website at www.seattle.gov/transportation/aurora110.htm for updated information and to sign-up with the listserv.

General questions about the project, please contact SDOT Communications Specialist Peg Nielsen. For specific questions pertaining to the design or property issues, contact SDOT project manager Diana Holloway. Contact information is provided on last page.

Sidewalk improvements and landscaping

How wide will the sidewalk area be once construction is complete?

WSDOT's Corridor Study recommended a *minimum* width of 10.5 ft for the sidewalk zone on both sides of Aurora Avenue North. This would accommodate space for curbs, sidewalks, street trees, plantings, and utilities such as street lighting. To provide the most benefit for pedestrians, SDOT hopes to construct a 12 ft sidewalk zone along the corridor where possible. In some areas, the width might be less due to roadway or building constraints. Within the sidewalk zone, a minimum paved walking area per City Standard is 5.0 ft, but this does not include space for curbs and landscaping, or the clearances required for utilities.

Does this project include plans to complete sidewalk improvements on the streets that cross Aurora?

SDOT will construct new sidewalks along both sides of Aurora Avenue North. Additional sidewalk improvements will occur at locations where existing sidewalk pavement on cross-streets needs to be transitioned to the new sidewalk pavement on Aurora Avenue North.

Who do I contact about getting sidewalks or wheel chair curb ramps constructed in my neighborhood?

Sidewalk requests should go to SDOT's Pedestrian Program. Please visit <http://www.ci.seattle.wa.us/transportation/pedestrian.htm> or call (206) 684-7583.

Are the planting areas needed since they may increase the project's right-of-way needs?

The landscaping will create a more welcoming and attractive atmosphere for pedestrians, motorists, and abutting businesses, while also providing a physical buffer between vehicle traffic and pedestrians. The width of the planting areas will vary throughout the corridor depending on the location of street trees and planting strips.

Where there will be a need to purchase private property, SDOT may agree to a reduced sidewalk zone width. However, as properties are redeveloped over time, the city will determine if improvements such as additional landscaping and sidewalk are needed to achieve a 12 ft sidewalk zone.

What accommodations are being made for bicycles on Aurora?

Aurora Avenue North is a heavily used vehicle highway with fast moving traffic and many driveways. These conditions make bicycling on Aurora Avenue North a challenge. The proposed improvements will improve east/west crossings so bicyclists can connect to adjacent neighborhoods and parallel routes.

What accommodations are being made for people with special needs?

SDOT will construct sidewalks on both sides of the roadway as well as wheel chair curb ramps with yellow detectable warning surfaces at all street crossings. The sidewalks will accommodate a standard wheelchair.

What plans do you have for the pedestrian bridge at N 130th Street? Would there be enough ROW to keep it?

This project will not affect the structure itself, but will affect the sidewalks around it. The result will be improved access to the bridge and new wheel chair curb ramps will go in (street level) at the intersection.

Impacts on traffic flow

Can SDOT install a new signal at N 143rd Street in order to provide access to businesses and relieve some of the congestion at N 145th Street?

Traffic at the N 145th Street signal currently backs up past N 143rd Street. SDOT has looked at putting a new signal at N 143rd Street but its proximity to N 145th Street means there is a strong likelihood that a new signal would create more congestion and may also create new safety hazards. As a result, N 140th Street would be the preferred location for a new traffic signal. At this time, however, the city is not pursuing a signal at N 140th Street because this location has limited vehicle circulation/connectivity and it lacks a bus zone and pedestrian crossing. Should a signal be met warrants in the future, the city will have taken the steps to do so by already having installed the necessary facilities to house conduit etc. Ultimately, WSDOT is the agency responsible for approving new traffic signals along State Highways like Aurora Avenue North.

Will the medians result in traffic delays at the major intersections and push traffic into neighborhood side streets?

SDOT's traffic analysis shows that the traffic for the north-south through-lanes will improve as turning vehicles move into either left-turn pockets or the BAT lanes.

What improvements to N 135th Street are planned to handle traffic?

Though this intersection does require improvements to address current capacity issues, SDOT does not anticipate that this project will generate additional traffic on N 135th Street and there are no major improvements currently planned on this cross street as part of this project.

Transit improvements

Are both the northbound and southbound BAT lanes going to be in effect 24 hours a day?

Yes. Aurora Avenue North is a major transit corridor for the region and is just one part of the region's transportation system that includes the Interstate 5 corridor and the Light Rail system currently under construction. As a part of this regional transportation system, it has been identified as a candidate for a future Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) investment. The BAT lanes will enable Metro to provide more reliable service all hours of the day. The BAT lanes will also enhance the capacity and safety of the remaining travel lanes by removing slower moving buses from the stream of general traffic and allowing space for cars turning right from or onto Aurora to slow down or speed up.

Could the BAT lanes be open to all traffic during non-peak traffic hours?

Not at this time. However, once the BAT lanes are constructed and in operation, SDOT will see if changes in the restrictions are warranted.

Will this project include additional bus stops along the corridor?

Metro will keep transit stops in their existing locations. If SDOT is able to put a new signal between N 135th and N 145th Streets, then Metro would likely install a new transit stop near the new intersection.

Could light rail along Aurora be included as a part of this project?

The improvements proposed for Aurora do not include light rail. However, the new southbound BAT lane will accommodate more buses and enable BRT to be implemented on Aurora Avenue North. This will help Metro improve service for residents and commuters along one of the busiest transit corridors in the city.

Access to businesses and neighborhoods

Why do we need a median? Could we keep the center double-turn lane as-is?

Safety is the city's top priority and we are installing a median to address many of the safety concerns that exist on Aurora Avenue North today. Design standards established by WSDOT also tell us what conditions should exist before installing a median onto a roadway.

In this case, Aurora Avenue North is a state highway (SR-99) and part of the National Highway System (NHS), making it fall under the jurisdiction of WSDOT's design standards and Washington State Access Management law. Aurora Avenue North is also a Class 4 facility according to the WSDOT access control classification system and standards. Within this class, access management measures are identified such as the installation of medians to mitigate turning, weaving, and crossing conflicts that affect safe travel. WSDOT requires a raised median to be implemented (replace the center turning lane) on Class 4 facilities with more than 25,000 vehicles per day. Aurora Avenue North has about 40,000 along this stretch of the corridor. In addition, WSDOT prohibits these two-way center turn lanes on roadways where there are more than two lanes in each direction. The roadway along Aurora Avenue North currently exceeds this maximum.

The number and frequency of accidents along the corridor is another important aspect of the design process affecting the criteria for requiring a median. Between January 2002 and December 2004, over 500 accidents occurred between N 110th and N 145th Streets, with 177 accidents located in or associated with the center turn lane. In short, under these design standards and accident history, a median is required for this project.

To provide mid-block access between signalized intersections, the City has planned a number of turning pockets along the corridor. See below for more information about these mid-block turning locations.

I'm worried that the medians will affect access to businesses or my neighborhood. Where are left turns and u-turns allowed?

Left turns and u-turns by passenger vehicles will be allowed at all seven existing signalized intersections between N 110th and N 145th Streets. In addition, SDOT is proposing to build a total of nine left-turn/U-turn passenger vehicle locations for both north and south bound traffic mid-block, between signalized intersections, and at unsignalized intersections:

- Between N 118th and N 125th Streets, one turn in each direction (2)
- At the N 127th Street and N 143rd Street unsignalized intersections, northbound turns will be provided (2)
- Between N 130th and N 135th Streets, one turn in each direction (2)
- At N 137th Street, one turn in each direction (2)
- At N 140th, southbound turn will be provided (1)

How is SDOT deciding where to place breaks in the median?

The final locations for the breaks in the median will be determined by several factors such as the distance between intersections, safe turning widths, and adequate space for turning motorists lining up at the

intersection. SDOT has been seeking input from business owners (and will continue to do so) to learn the operations of businesses to see if the proposed location for breaks in the median can be shifted.

How will large delivery trucks access businesses once the median is constructed?

For those businesses with special needs, such as car dealerships, SDOT will meet with the business owners to discuss ways of accommodating those deliveries. Possible options could include consolidation and/or widening of driveways to manage delivery activities.

Parking, signage and other right-of-way impacts

The preliminary plans show that some businesses will need to reconfigure parking stalls or relocate signage. How is SDOT going to address that?

The answer depends on whether the parking and/or signage are located on city right-of-way or private property. SDOT will compensate property owners for loss of code-compliant parking and signage on privately-owned property. SDOT will also oversee and pay for the construction of private property modifications required as a result of changed parking configurations allowed by code. It is important to note that the current plans are still preliminary and the city is in the process of obtaining additional ground survey to confirm property impacts.

What if my parking or signage is on City right-of-way?

City-owned right-of-way is intended for the use and benefit of the general traveling public. Private use may be allowed (usually by street use permit) if there is not a current, general public need. Because no private property rights are involved, the City does not compensate property or business owners for loss of parking or signage that is located on City-owned right-of-way.

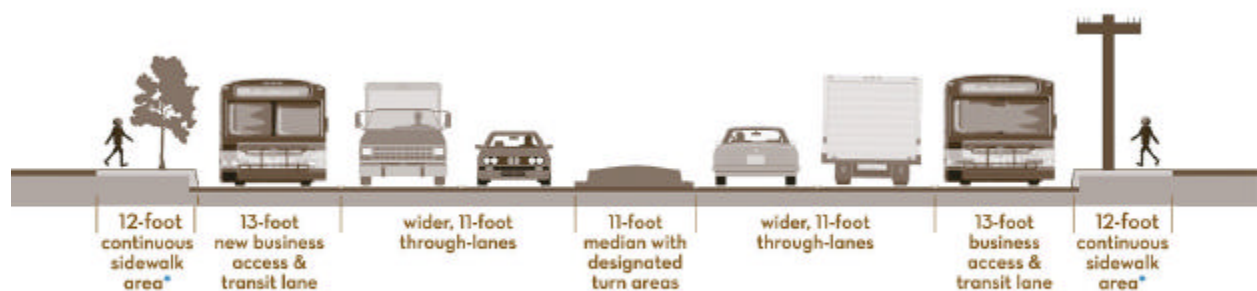
How do I determine if my parking or signage is on private property?

SDOT created aerial photos with the preliminary alignment that provide a good representation of property lines. These photos were presented at recent public meetings and with business and community groups. As SDOT continues the design process, we will obtain additional ground survey of the street right-of-way that will include the adjacent properties as needed to develop the design. Property owners may hire a surveyor if this information is desired prior to the City obtaining it.

The preliminary plans show impacts to some buildings. If a portion of a building is eliminated, how is SDOT going to handle that?

One of SDOT's goals for this project is to reduce physical impacts to private property, especially buildings. However, if there are locations where impacts cannot be avoided, SDOT will compensate property owners for loss or damage to private property including the costs to modify buildings. While the design plans are preliminary, we will know with more certainty the extent of the private property impacts as the design is refined. Throughout the design process, SDOT will continue meeting with property owners to determine ways to reduce such impacts.

Can SDOT narrow the median or build a simple barrier (like a curb) to reduce the project's right-of-way needs?



**sidewalk area width may vary due to existing structures and right-of-way constraints and opportunities*

SDOT is making considerable effort to minimize right-of-way needs and impacts to private property owners. The proposed cross-section above is a result of the 2003 Corridor Study and is the standard to which SDOT must build. Reducing the size of the median where there are no left turns would not reduce right-of-way needs significantly. The recommended lane widths shown above are already narrower than current design standards which will require formal approval from WSDOT. All changes to the adopted cross-section will require review and approval from the WSDOT.

Utilities and stormwater improvements

Does this project include plans to underground the utilities along Aurora as was done in Shoreline?

Currently, there is no funding for putting utilities like street lighting underground. Seattle City Light does not expect that funding would become available by the time SDOT begins construction.

How is SDOT going to handle side sewer reconnections? Will out-of-code side sewers be brought up to code?

SDOT does not anticipate that existing side sewers will be impacted by the project. However, SDOT will reconstruct side sewers if they conflict with project improvements or are damaged during construction.

Does this project include improvements for managing storm water?

Yes, SDOT will be constructing a new storm water collection system and storm water quality treatment facilities as required for the roadway to meet the City's stormwater code and construction standards.

Improving public safety on Aurora

What is SDOT doing to discourage illegal activity on Aurora Avenue?

SDOT has heard businesses and residents share concerns with the illegal activity that exists along Aurora today. SDOT is approaching the design work with these concerns in mind, specifically to not provide shelter or cover for illegal activities, and we have made considerable effort to create an attractive and safe streetscape. Design features that address these concerns include landscaping adjacent to the sidewalks and within medians. The landscaping will include low-lying shrubs to ensure a high level of visibility for vehicles and pedestrians. SDOT also expects that the improved sidewalks and enhanced lighting will result in more people using the sidewalk zone along Aurora which will serve as an additional deterrent to criminal activity.

Where can I find more information?

Visit the project website at www.seattle.gov/transportation/aurora110.htm for additional information.

You can also contact:

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or

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